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ABSTRACT

Group assertion training has employed a variety of techniques including bibliotherapy, behavioral rehearsal, and didactic lecture presentations. Whether didactic information affects behavior, structure, and/or self-evaluation is unknown, and it is not clear whether behavioral practice enhances the effects of didactic training upon behavior, structure, and self-affect of trainees. Male (N=7) and female (N=21) undergraduates (14 recruits and 14 volunteers) participated in five weeks of group assertion training to investigate the effectiveness of didactic versus rehearsal techniques. The subjects were divided into two treatment conditions: a didactic and a didactic plus rehearsal group. Measures of personality structure, behavior, and self-rated affect revealed that trainees improved in assertiveness and self-rated affect, demonstrated no changes in neuroticism, and exhibited negative changes in both extroversion and defensiveness. Results also revealed that didactic training alone was almost as effective as didactic and rehearsal training combined. The recruits were less assertive but more socially poised than volunteers for assertion training, suggesting that generalizations from recruit populations to volunteer clients should be made with caution. (Author)

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# A Multi-Modal Assessment of Didactic Versus Rehearsal Group Assertion Training

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# A Multi-Modal Assessment of Didactic Versus Rehearsal Group Assertion Training

For nearly one decade, group assertion training has proven to be an effective clinical technique for modifying the nonassertive behavior of a variety of student and patient populations (Galassi, Galassi, & Litz, 1974; Hedquist & Weinhold, 1970; Hoffman, 1974; Joanning, 1976; Lomont, Gilner, Spector, & Skinner, 1969; Rathus, 1972, 1973). Despite considerable investigation in the area, few studies have comprehensively evaluated the effectiveness of group assertive therapy (i.e., Galassi, Galassi, & Litz, 1974). Strupp and Hadley (1977) have recently proposed a tripartite model of mental health and therapeutic outcome which may detect both the positive as well as negative effects of group assertion training. The model recommends that standardized assessment devices be employed to measure therapy outcome from three perspectives: (a) the client's self-evaluation of affect or well-being, (b) the therapist's structural evaluation of the client's personality, and (c) society's evaluation of the client's behavior. In a recent case study Schnidman and Layne (1979) assessed the effectiveness of assertive therapy on a female undergraduate student using Strupp and Hadley's tripartite model. Structural, affective, and behavioral assessment devices were each administered prior to, repeatedly during, and one, ten, 18, and 26 weeks following treatment. Results of the case study revealed that assertion training exerted positive effects upon each evaluative

perspective. One of the primary purposes of the present investigation was to assess the effects of group assertion training upon the personality structure, behavior, and self-affect of recruit and volunteer trainees.

In line with Strupp and Hadley's conceptualization, subjects are often selected for assertion training research via self-evaluation criteria (volunteers) or via structural criteria (psychometric recruits). In outpatient treatment settings, clients are typically self-referred volunteers and are rarely, if ever, recruited exclusively via psychometric measures. Thus, research using psychometric recruits as subjects cannot be directly generalized to actual outpatient treatment, unless it is demonstrated that the source of the subject fails to influence the outcome of assertion training. The current study was designed to examine the differential impact of assertion training upon volunteers and upon psychometric recruits.

A variety of techniques have been employed in group assertion training including behavioral rehearsal (e.g., Joanning, 1976), didactic lecture presentations and bibliotherapy (e.g., Hoffman, 1974). To date the most widely used and researched treatment modality for improving assertive skill has been behavioral rehearsal (Alberti & Emmons, 1974). However, currently, many persons are exposed to didactic material on assertiveness through books and lectures. Whether this didactic information affects behavior, structure, and/or self-evaluation is unknown. Further, it is not clear whether behavioral practice

enhances the effects of didactic training upon behavior, structure, and self-affect of trainees. The present investigation was also designed to compare the effectiveness of didactic versus rehearsal techniques in group assertion training.

## Method

### Subjects

Seven male and 21 female undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi completed the group assertion training. Mean age was 21.95 years. Half of the subjects were recruited from psychology classes using the College Self-Expression Scale (CSES) (Galassi, Delo, Galassi, & Bastein, 1974). Students who obtained scores in the assertive deficit range of 105 or lower (at least one standard deviation below the mean) were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the study. The other half of the subjects were volunteers. This group responded to announcements in the campus newspaper indicating the formation of assertion training groups at the University Psychology Clinic. The first 20 recruits and 20 volunteers who expressed an interest in assertion training participated in the study. However, twelve students (six recruits and six volunteers) discontinued treatment for various personal reasons.

### Instruments

The CSES (Galassi et al., 1974) served as a screening instrument for assertion deficit in student recruits and a structural measure for all trainees. This 50-item questionnaire asks respondents to rate, on a five-point scale, for each item their probability of engaging

in the behavior if actually presented with the situation (0 = almost always or always/4 = never or rarely).

The Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968) was employed as a second structural measure for all participants. This inventory consists of 57 self-report questions which the respondent answers "yes" or "no". The EPI assessed students on a neuroticism-stability (N) and on an extroversion-introversion (E) personality dimension. A response distortion (Lie) scale included in the inventory assessed test taking defensiveness. Each alternate form (A and B) of the EPI was administered twice to each participant.

The Subjective Units of Disturbance Scale (SUDS) (Wolpe, 1969) was employed repeatedly to assess self-evaluated anxiety and discomfort. SUDS measures consist of self-ratings of disturbance ranging from 0 (extreme comfort and relaxation) to 100 (extreme anxiety and disturbance).

A Behavioral Assertiveness Test (BAT) (Eisler, Miller, & Hersen, 1973) was employed as another dependent measure for all trainees. Three audiotaped vignettes were presented to students. Responses to each vignette were videotaped and rated independently by two trained graduate assistant raters. Raters received advanced instruction, specific guidelines, training, and practice in rating.

Design

Each structural and self-evaluation dependent measure was analyzed with a 2 (treatments) x 2 (subject source) x 2 (pre-post) analysis of

variance with repeated measures on the last factor. Behavioral dependent measures were analyzed with a 2 (treatments) x 2 (subject source) x 2 (pre-post) x 3 (scenes) analysis of variance with repeated measures on the last two factors. Gender was disregarded since previous research (Galassi, Galassi, & Litz, 1974; Hall, 1975) has demonstrated that gender exerts no effects upon the outcome of assertion training.

Procedure

Interested student recruits and volunteers met individually with the experimenter for an initial briefing session. Those students who agreed to participate in assertion training signed informed consent sheets and were administered a pre-treatment assessment battery consisting of the CSES (except student recruits who had already completed the form in classrooms), the EPI, the SUDS, and the BAT.

Students were divided into four assertion training groups: two didactic and two didactic plus rehearsal. Each group consisted of half recruits and half volunteers. Assertion training sessions were conducted by an advanced doctoral student in clinical psychology. Training was weekly for 90 minutes and extended through five weeks. Didactic training consisted of lectures and reading assignments on assertiveness and assertion training from the manual, Your Perfect Right: A Guide to Assertive Behavior (Alberti & Emmons, 1974). Didactic plus rehearsal training emphasized behavioral rehearsal but included an abbreviated didactic presentation and the readings from the assertion manual. At the conclusion of training, all students were administered a post-treatment assessment battery which was identical to the pre-treatment

battery. Three weeks following assertion therapy, students were administered a follow-up assessment battery consisting of structural and self-evaluation measures.

## Results

### Structural and Self-Evaluation Measures

The undergraduates' performances on each structural and self-evaluation measure are presented in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Analyses of variance on each of these measures revealed pre-post main effects on each measure. Following training, undergraduates evidenced significantly (a) greater assertiveness on the CSES, $F(1,24) = 33.46$, $p < .001$, (b) less extroversion on the EPI, $F(1,24) = 18.60$, $p < .001$, (c) more defensiveness on the EPI Lie scale, $F(1,24) = 8.30$, $p < .01$, and (d) less self evaluated anxiety on the SUDS, $F(1,24) = 10.96$, $p < .01$. Undergraduates tended to score in the more neurotic direction following treatment, but the difference was not significant, $F(1,24) = 2.99$, $p < .10$. Finally, a subject source main effect was obtained on the CSES, $F(1,24) = 5.14$, $p < .05$, indicating that recruits were generally less assertive than volunteers. No other Fs approached significance for any of the structural and self-evaluation measures ($p < .10$).

Follow-up assessment measures revealed that undergraduates tended to maintain increased assertiveness on the CSES, less extroversion on the EPI, and less self evaluated anxiety on the SUDS. Undergraduates,

however, tended to show less neuroticism and defensiveness on the EPI at follow-up.

Behavioral Measures

Pearson Product Moment correlational analyses revealed exceedingly high interrater reliabilities for all five BAT measures (all $r$'s $\geq .90$).

Undergraduates' performances on each behavioral measure are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Analyses of variance were computed

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Insert Tables 2, 3, and 4 about here

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on each measure and results are as follows: For overall assertiveness a subject source, $F(1,24) = 6.64$, $p < .05$, and a pre-post, $F(1,24) = 29.48$, $p < .001$ main effect were found. These two variables also significantly interacted, $F(1,24) = 5.18$, $p < .05$. Additional analyses revealed that volunteers were significantly more assertive than were recruits prior to ($p < .01$) but not following ($p > .10$) training and that both groups increased their assertiveness from pre to post ($p < .05$). Similarly, it was found that volunteers exhibited significantly more assertive content than did recruits, $F(1,24) = 7.81$, $p < .01$, and that both subject groups increased their assertive content significantly from pre to post, $F(1,24) = 21.65$, $p < .001$.

The analyses of variance also revealed significant pre-post main effects for undergraduates' response duration, $F(1,24) = 6.57$, $p < .05$, voice intonation, $F(1,24) = 28.67$, $p < .001$, and poise, $F(1,24) = 9.89$, $p < .005$. In addition, significant treatment by pre-post interactions

were found on poise, $F(1,24) = 4.60$, $p < .05$, and on intonation, $F(1,24) = 9.71$, $p < .005$, and a significant treatment main effect was found on poise, $F(1,24) = 6.43$, $p < .05$. Additional analyses revealed that didactic groups were, inexplicably, significantly more poised and more vocally intonated ($p < .01$) prior to treatment, and significantly less poised and intonated ($p < .01$) following treatment. An additional main effect on poise revealed that volunteers were significantly less poised than were recruits.

Finally, the scenes variable exerted scattered effects upon the measures, indicating that differences sometimes became more extreme as the latter scenes were presented.

## Discussion

The present investigation employed Strupp and Hadley's (1977) "tripartite model" to assess the effects of group assertion training upon trainees' personality structure, behavior, and self-evaluation. Results demonstrated positive increases in trainees' self-evaluated assertion (CSES), and on each behavioral index of assertiveness. Self-reported anxiety also declined following treatment. However, structural changes in neuroticism, extroversion and lie were not favorable. Eysenck and Eysenck (1968) reported that increased extroversion and reduced neuroticism and defensiveness are associated with higher emotional adjustment. But current findings revealed that trainees became significantly less extroverted and significantly more defensive immediately following treatment. The change in neuroticism was not significant. Assertion training, whether didactic or rehearsal,

appears to modify behavior and self reported affect in a favorable way, but may exert a deleterious effect upon personality structure. Perhaps the increased introversion is the result of subjects becoming more preoccupied with their internal thoughts and feelings.

The current study also investigated the effectiveness of didactic versus didactic plus rehearsal group assertion training. Results demonstrated that rehearsal failed to enhance the effectiveness of didactic training upon not only the structural and self-evaluation measures, but also the behavioral measures of overall assertiveness, assertive content and response duration. Rehearsal may have been more effective than didactic training with respect to voice intonation and poise, but even these minor effects may be a product of the chance differences obtained between treatment groups on the pre-measures. These present results replicate Joanning's (1976) and Hoffman's (1974) research findings, indicating that didactic training alone is as effective as didactic plus rehearsal training in benefitting non-assertive undergraduate students. Furthermore, didactic procedures seem to be more efficient and less time consuming than rehearsal oriented techniques. The effectiveness of didactic treatment in modifying individuals' non-assertive behavior has implications for the mass distribution of assertion training manuals for "self-help consumers." It seems plausible that many non-assertive people may educate and train themselves to become more assertive and less uncomfortable but perhaps more introverted and defensive, through bibliotherapy. An important question which merits additional attention is

what is the most therapeutically effective and safe method of transmitting information to individuals in assertion training programs?

Finally, results of the present study demonstrated no significant differences between subject source, initially, on neuroticism, extroversion, lie, self-reported anxiety, response duration, and voice intonation. Prior to treatment, volunteers were found to display more self-reported assertiveness, assertive content and overall assertiveness, while recruits had greater social poise prior to treatment. Volunteer clients may differ from psychometric recruits in that the former may be more assertive but less socially skilled in a broader sense. Perhaps volunteers for assertion training misinterpret their social difficulties as being the product of a more narrow skill-deficit than is actually the case.

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Table 1

Structural and Self-Evaluation (SUDS) Means

(Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

| Subjects | | CSES | Structural EPI - Neuroticism | EPI Extroversion | EPI Lie | SUDS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Didactic | pre | 112.86 (34.12) | .14 (1.40) | -.76 (1.33) | -.07 (1.39) | 54.15 (26.49) |
| Volunteers | post | 131.57 (29.27) | .04 (1.03) | -.08 (1.41) | 1.97 (3.87) | 31.71 (24.71) |
| Didactic | pre | 97.00 (8.53) | .45 (1.10) | -1.08 (.65) | -.96 (.69) | 40.00 (22.80) |
| Recruits | post | 119.50 (7.84) | .58 (.68) | -.01 (.88) | .75 (.91) | 33.33 (17.80) |
| Rehearsal | pre | 116.00 (23.37) | .13 (.85) | -1.06 (.90) | -.54 (1.11) | 50.88 (22.74) |
| Volunteers | post | 132.50 (20.11) | .46 (.76) | -.20 (1.00) | .02 (.70) | 34.37 (27.05) |
| Rehearsal | pre | 90.57 (9.50) | .18 (.76) | -1.07 (.80) | -.30 (.56) | 45.71 (20.09) |
| Recruits | post | 117.29 (23.91) | .74 (.98) | -.43 (.43) | .15 (1.15) | 29.71 (11.43) |

Table 2

Behavioral Assertiveness Test Scene 1 Means (Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

| Subjects | | Behavioral Measures | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Overall Assertiveness | Assertive Content | Social Poise | Voice Intonation | Response Duration (secs.) |
| Didactic Volunteers | pre | 2.93 (1.57) | 2.79 (1.70) | 2.00 (.76) | 2.79 (.81) | 4.63 (4.62) |
| | post | 4.00 (.00) | 4.14 (.24) | 1.71 (.39) | 3.21 (.76) | 14.78 (16.02) |
| Didactic Recruits | pre | 3.67 (.52) | 4.17 (.68) | 1.75 (.69) | 3.00 (.87) | 8.36 (6.88) |
| | post | 3.33 (1.25) | 3.33 (1.25) | 1.31 (.41) | 3.58 (.86) | 6.38 (4.31) |
| Rehearsal Volunteers | pre | 3.69 (.92) | 3.63 (1.38) | 2.19 (.86) | 3.25 (.96) | 6.87 (2.76) |
| | post | 4.06 (.18) | 4.31 (.53) | 1.31 (.46) | 3.75 (.93) | 10.15 (5.35) |
| Rehearsal Recruits | pre | 2.43 (1.51) | 2.64 (1.70) | 2.07 (.73) | 1.93 (.35) | 2.34 (2.05) |
| | post | 4.29 (.27) | 4.36 (.56) | 1.36 (.63) | 3.36 (.85) | 8.19 (7.56) |

Table 3

Behavioral Assertiveness Test Scene 2 Means (Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

| Subjects | | Behavioral Measures | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Overall Assertiveness | Assertive Content | Social Poise | Voice Intonation | Response Duration (secs.) |
| Didactic | pre | 3.64 (1.31) | 4.14 (1.46) | 2.07 (1.24) | 2.93 (1.40) | 8.49 (6.93) |
| Volunteers | post | 4.07 (.19) | 4.29 (.57) | 2.00 (.50) | 3.50 (1.12) | 15.86 (15.00) |
| Didactic | pre | 3.00 (1.67) | 2.92 (1.56) | 1.58 (.58) | 3.50 (1.05) | 7.50 (3.82) |
| Recruits | post | 3.75 (.88) | 3.67 (1.33) | 1.33 (.52) | 3.75 (1.04) | 8.51 (3.35) |
| Rehearsal | pre | 3.50 (1.20) | 3.44 (1.21) | 2.94 (1.12) | 3.19 (1.22) | 7.01 (3.29) |
| Volunteers | post | 4.13 (.23) | 4.56 (.50) | 1.56 (.62) | 4.13 (.79) | 11.34 (3.05) |
| Rehearsal | pre | 2.71 (1.38) | 3.00 (2.00) | 2.57 (1.13) | 2.14 (.85) | 5.45 (3.88) |
| Recruits | post | 4.00 (.29) | 3.93 (.45) | 1.71 (.57) | 3.71 (.64) | 11.96 (7.04) |

Table 4

Behavioral Assertiveness Test Scene 3 Means (Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

| Subjects | | Behavioral Measures | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Overall Assertiveness | Assertive Content | Social Poise | Voice Intonation | Response Duration (secs.) |
| Didactic | pre | 3.64 (1.07) | 3.79 (1.29) | 2.29 (.99) | 3.64 (.90) | 6.29 (4.13) |
| Volunteers | post | 3.64 (1.18) | 3.71 (1.25) | 2.64 (.56) | 3.64 (.85) | 7.75 (5.30) |
| Didactic | pre | 2.58 (1.77) | 2.50 (1.67) | 1.92 (.86) | 3.42 (1.32) | 6.62 (5.24) |
| Recruits | post | 3.92 (.49) | 4.08 (.49) | 1.75 (1.04) | 3.42 (.86) | 6.82 (4.12) |
| Rehearsal | pre | 3.94 (1.08) | 3.94 (1.29) | 2.56 (.50) | 3.75 (.80) | 7.40 (4.44) |
| Volunteers | post | 4.38 (.35) | 4.44 (.50) | 2.69 (.80) | 4.25 (.76) | 10.47 (3.78) |
| Rehearsal | pre | 1.79 (1.35) | 1.93 (1.59) | 2.79 (.91) | 2.14 (.94) | 4.14 (4.46) |
| Recruits | post | 4.07 (.19) | 3.93 (.19) | 2.07 (.79) | 4.14 (.80) | 8.68 (6.49) |